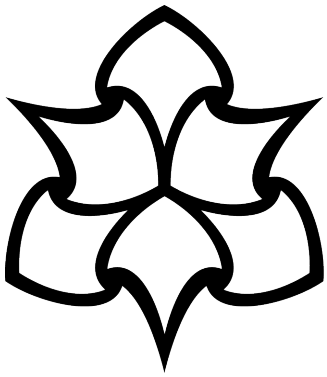

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Liquidness: Conceptualising water within boating tourism

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the elemental materialities of water mobilities, bringing the agentive qualities of water to the centre of theoretical discussion of tourism. Analysing data collected through qualitative interviews with, and participant observation of, British boating tourists, the analysis of watery materialities and the corresponding tourist assemblages are presented across water bodies: on inland waterways and in coastal areas. Examining the mobilities of the water materialities and the cooperation between water, boat and the tourist, we propose the concept of water-boat-human assemblage for examining boating tourism in terms of liquid relationships. The paper also introduces the notion of liquidness: the relational conglomerate between mobilities, materialities and practices as an analytical category for theorising water tourism.

Introduction: experiencing and thinking water

Water is omnipresent: crucial for not only sustaining biological life but also social and cultural relations through its numerous interactions with humans, in short, a socio-natural materiality (Linton, 2010). Humans and animals, themselves consisting largely of water, inhabit a planet which similarly consists of water in large proportion (Steinberg, 2014). As humans we live, work and travel near water, immerse ourselves in water, and move on water using a variety of vessels of differing size and purpose. We share the watery spaces with numerous non-human animals; and across cultures, people celebrate a multitude of sensory, spiritual and aesthetic experiences afforded by water (Alberti, 2014; Bachelard, 1983; Ellis, 2014; Krause & Strang, 2016; Strang, 2005). Water is also an ever pervasive element in tourism, having historically held a special place through its associations with holiness, religiosity and, later, with the ideas of wellbeing and health as evident in the development of the spa towns and seaside resorts (Saxena, 2018; Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Ward, 1998). Tourists enjoy water's varied velocity, from the dynamic drama of waterfalls to the silent creep of glaciers and appreciate its erosive and creative influence on landscapes. Water's omnipresence in tourism allows for a multitude of activities to take place on, in or near lakes, rivers, estuaries, reservoirs, canals, seas and oceans. In short, water is one of the central resources in tourism: we consume it; we snowboard, skate and ski on its frozen form, raft on rapids, sail on seas, cruise on canals; we submerge ourselves in it to swim, snorkel and scuba dive. Yet, in most of the accounts of water in social sciences in general, and tourism studies in particular, water is seldom seen as agentive and is regularly regarded as a mere backdrop to various activities (Anderson & Peters, 2014).

In this paper, therefore, we focus on the tourist experience with water (Chen, MacLeod, & Neimanis, 2013), but also across different waters, that is by discussing being on and with salty seawater on sailboats and unhurried canal water on the narrowboats. Drawing on the new mobilities paradigm (Hannam, Butler, & Paris, 2014; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) and bringing it together with recent thinking on materialities, specifically the ideas concerning material agency and assemblages (Bennett, 2010; Dant, 2014; Deleuze & Guattari, 1988; Kennedy, Zapasnik, McCann, & Bruce, 2013; Saxena, 2018), we propose an analytical framework for

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focusing on water as a material substance and actant in tourism theorising, yielding further understandings of the mobile tourist experience.

As mentioned above, there are many different ways of being mobile with water, namely tourism, leisure, recreation and utility transport. Our focus lies with boating tourism: holidays in which the experience of boating is deeply embedded in the creation and formation of the tourist experience itself; in which the mode of transport is a central component of the holiday and integral to the holiday product (Lumsdon & Page, 2011). Boating tourism is a major sector of the UK tourism industry worth £6 billion in sales in 2018, representing a 65% growth since 2013 and the creation of 62,200 new jobs (British Marine, 2019). Specifically, we focus on two sub-sectors of the boating tourism industry to provide the context for our research: canal (inland) and sail (marine) boating. In the 12 months to September 2018, 450,000 adults took part in canal boating and 370,000 adults took part in yacht cruising (which we refer to as sailing tourism in our study) (Arkenford, 2018). The extant literature on water transport tourism focuses on a wide variety of water-borne craft such as sailboats, ocean liners, powerboats, motor boats, kayaks, canoes and others on different bodies of water, be they oceanic, marine and inland (Hall & Härkönen, 2006; Jennings, 2007; Johns & Clarke, 2001; Kaaristo & Rhoden, 2017; Lukovic, 2013; Prideaux & Cooper, 2009; Roehl, Ditton, & Fesenmaier, 1989; Vallerani & Visentin, 2018; Wood, 2000).

However, the agentive role of the materialities that the human bodies co-operate with when engaging in boating tourism has often been overlooked. By focusing on water as the guiding materiality of boating tourism and by thinking conceptually across different water bodies, we suggest bringing the materiality of water and the ways it affects tourist practice to the foreground of the analysis. This means understanding boating tourism within the context of the hydrosocial cycle, a socio-natural reciprocal relationship between water and the individual. We focus on 'the dialectical and relational processes through which water and society interrelate' (Linton & Budds, 2014, p. 170), zooming in on what water as a materiality can 'authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid and so on' (Latour, 2005, p. 72) in tourism. The study is positioned within the new mobilities paradigm (Sheller & Urry, 2006), which sees the increasing de-differentiation of the blurry boundaries between 'leisure, culture, retailing, education, sport, hobbies and everyday life' (Gale, 2008: 1). We agree with Lepoša (2018), who argues for further challenging the theoretical separation between home and away in tourism studies. Through analysing two particular ways of being mobile with water within tourism, namely sailing and canal boating, we will demonstrate how boating tourism is characterised and constantly (re)made by watery unpredictability.

The paper begins by discussing the extant literature on mobilities and embodiment of water, followed by an elaboration on the materialities of boating tourism. The subsequent section is concerned with the research context and methodology of this study: holiday sailing and canal boating in the United Kingdom. The discussion and analysis section discusses the watery materialities of tourism through presenting the key findings of the paper. We draw out the centrality of water as a material substance in the formation of embodied tourist experiences, and the entanglements of water, humans and vessels in a mobility assemblage characterised by constant and simultaneous difference and repetition. We conclude by underlining how thinking of boating in terms of liquidness helps us to better understand, discuss and theorise boating tourism.

Mobilities and bodies of water

"It is the laminar quality of water that makes various mobilities possible – but it also creates frictions, immobilities and moorings … complicating the boundaries between moving and staying, scarcity and abundance, 'nature' and 'culture'" (Bowles, Kaaristo, & Rogelja Caf, 2019, p. 5–6). Water is not merely a backdrop for various tourist activities, or a passive matter to be guided and utilised through water management. Instead, it is lively, vibrant (Bennett, 2010) and mobile component in a set of relations and interactions between the human and non-human (Gibbs, 2013). To express it more evocatively, 'water will appear to us as a complete being with body, soul and voice' (Bachelard, 1983, p. 15), which is why there is a need to think about the aqueous in more collaborative and co-productive terms (Chen et al., 2013) in tourism research.

Steinberg and Peters (2015, p. 248) propose the notion of wet ontologies, enabling us to 'not merely to endorse the perspective of a world of flows, connections, liquidities, and becomings, but also to propose a means by which the sea's material and phenomenological distinctiveness can facilitate the reimagining and re-enlivening of a world ever on the move.' We suggest this could be achieved through theorising water as a materially distinct actant in movement in terms of mobilities theories (Sheller & Urry, 2006). The mobilities perspective argues for the socio-cultural world 'to be theorized as a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects' (Urry, 2007, p. 18). Mobilities can be theorized as amalgamations of corporealities, materialities, power relations, imaginations and virtualities (Cresswell & Merriman, 2011; Edensor, 2007; Hannam, 2008) and have been recently increasingly influential for theorising tourism (e.g. Cohen & Cohen, 2015; de Souza Bispo, 2016; Edensor & Kothari, 2018; Hannam et al., 2014; Janta & Christou, 2019; Jensen, Scarles, & Cohen, 2015; Kannisto, 2016; Larsen & Bærenholdt, 2019; Wu, Hannam, & Xu, 2018). As a matter that changes its state and form regularly, we see water as a physical manifestation and a powerful metaphor of the conceptual proposition that is mobility: at once affording movement of the humans and objects, whilst being constantly on the move itself.

The wet ontologies perspective (Steinberg & Peters, 2015) mainly draws inspiration from the maritime materialities of the seas and oceans, leaving inland water bodies out of water discussions and theorisations. The work of Strang (2004, 2009, 2014) on the political and emotional significance of inland water bodies is therefore an important addition. In her study of two river catchment areas, Strang (2009) offers a comprehensive analysis of water as a source for physical, social as well as spiritual 'regeneration' – the direct and continuous engagement with water through a variety of practices (cf. de Souza Bispo, 2016; Shove, Pantzar, & Watson, 2012). Furthermore, Krause (2017) suggests apprehending rivers from the perspective of water, thinking about 'fluvitories' with their

constantly shifting boundaries instead of terra-centric territories. These are important notions for advancing our thinking about water, however, it is not always useful to apprehend water based on the dualisms of freshwater and seawater. Instead, we propose an approach of thinking *across* that allows for a more comprehensive outlook on water as a dynamic and lively substance. This has implications for our understanding of tourism, as the tourist experience is determined by the various everyday engagements with the surrounding world and its agentive materialities (McCabe, 2002) and mobilities. We take our cue from Pitt (2018), who suggests paying attention to 'wateriness', that is, acknowledging the multiple dimensions, properties and potentialities of water.

When thinking about water, it is important to understand that we are not entangled with water in the same way as we are with, for example, artefacts (Hodder, 2014). This is because we consume water, live with water and we *are* water (Neimanis, 2017) simultaneously. We therefore need to think about water in terms of agency and the palpable flow, flux and interactive actions unfolding through time (Edgeworth, 2014) and along human actions (Hodder, 2014). In this sense, water should not be regarded as mere object of socio-cultural processes, but instead an actant 'that is both shaped by, and shapes, social relations, structures and subjectivities' (Linton & Budds, 2014, p. 170). This would result in an agency that is not exclusively human and in a flat ontology where entities share similar status while mutually affecting each other (Feely, 2019). As such, water tourism mobilities become 'sets of social practices and material arrangements that hang together and are interconnected in more or less strong and enduring ways' (Lamers, van der Duim, & Spaargaren, 2017, p. 56), which we will discuss next.

Water tourism assembleges

When studying human relationships with the material, we should pay attention to particular assemblages, the formation of which is "an ongoing process of arranging, organising or congealing how heterogeneous bodies, things or concepts come 'in connection with' one another" (Kennedy et al., 2013, p. 45). In terms of mobility, the focus has mostly been on the interplay between the human and the mode of transport, as is exemplified in the notion of 'driver-car', accentuating the relationship between the human and the vehicle (Dant, 2004, 2014) as well as the wider environment (Urry, 2006; Huijbens & Benediktsson, 2007; Wilson & Hannam, 2017). The creative power of materialities to self-organise should not be underestimated (de Landa, 2000) and agency should be viewed on a human to non-human continuum (Bennett, 2004, 2010). As Bennett (2010) proposes, agency is distributive and instead of intentionality and non-intentionality, the focus should lie on the various vitalities and relations between the human and material, especially on the latter's ability to creatively self-organise and form various groupings and conjunctions in collaborations with other materialities. Furthermore, we should pay attention to the role of practices (Lamers et al., 2017) that allow the material and substantive to become the centre of analysis: 'there is no longer a single passive object in the middle, waiting to be seen from the point of view of seemingly endless series of perspectives. Instead, objects come into being – and disappear – with the practices in which they are manipulated' (Mol, 2002, p. 5) and likewise, so do substances, water among them, bringing about new and relational assemblages through a number of practices.

> While matter moves, it becomes 'enrolled' in associational networks that produce qualitative changes and qualitatively new assemblages. These newly produced 'things' embody and reflect the processes of their making, but simultaneously differ radically from their constituent relational parts. While every metabolized thing embodies the complex processes and heterogeneous relations of its past making, it folds in its specific and material manner into new assemblages of metabolic transformation
>
> (Swyngedouw, 2015, p. 27)

Water is 'a useful focus for thinking about relationships between things and persons and between material properties and meanings' (Strang, 2014, p. 133). Conceptualising tourism as practice, de Souza Bispo (2016) has recently identified performances, mobilities and materialities as its key elements, incorporating the wider ontologies of the lived experience and connections with the environment. This means that the multiple forms of co-operation between humans, non-human animals, and the non-human actants have important implications in tourism research. Indeed attention has been paid to materialities in tourism after Haldrup and Larsen (2006, p. 276) pointed out that 'tourist studies have failed to understand the significance of materiality and objects in modern tourism.' Tourism is 'intimately involved and predicated on the movement of a whole range of materialities' (Hannam et al., 2014, p. 171) which allow us to determine the interrelations between the multiplicity of various human and material orderings within tourism situations (van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2013).

The resulting human-material interactions can be thought about as tourism assemblages, 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts [and] living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistence of energies that confound them from within' (Bennett, 2010, p. 23–24). The water bodies thus become 'bodies without organs' (BwOs) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) – assemblages of numerous affects, capacities, relations and potentialities to both afford and direct various multisensorial experiences (Saxena, 2018).

> A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. Still, the BwO is not a scene, a place, or even a support upon which something comes to pass. … It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree – to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. It is nonstratified, unformed, intense matter, the matrix of intensity …
>
> (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 160)

This highlights an important dimension of materiality, namely its continuous spatial dynamism, which relates directly to Bennett's (2004, p. 365) idea that 'place is a dynamic flow of matter-energy that tends to settle into various bodies, bodies that often join forces, make connections, form alliances.' These alliances are important since the central property of the 'body without organs' is that it puts

the affective assemblages of bodies, objects and abstractions at the centre of attention, instead of individuals. This view enables us to better understand the sensorial experiences of consumption of spaces (Saxena, 2018). Thinking about water in these terms allows us to pay attention to its different states and forms as well as to its varied interactions with humans and non-human objects, artefacts and other materialities.

Taking the role of materialities and non-humans seriously allows for interpretations about the production of tourism practices and their different relational orderings (Cohen & Cohen, 2019; van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2017). Some materialities have started slowly receiving attention, however studies focus mostly on small-scale artefacts of tourism, be it souvenirs (Hitchcock & Teague, 2000) or the simple bucket and spade on the beach (Franklin, 2014). A recent exception, grounded in mobilities theories, is a study on the materialities of campervan travel as slow tourism focusing on key socio-technical frictions such as gradients, weather, surfaces and other vehicles (Wilson & Hannam, 2017). Boating tourism research off the coast of Sweden (Lepoša, 2018) has revealed how the material affordances of boating have transformed practices over time. Boats and the water bodies become a 'home' and a place of ontological safety through a set of everyday life practices performed in a holiday context. Cohen and Cohen (2019, p. 161) suggest that the 'more obvious materialities' of tourism need research too. In this paper, we respond to this call to action and focus on the elemental, substantive and ubiquitous, that is, water.

Research context and methodology

Our primary research adopts a qualitative, inductive approach comprising three stages of data collection. First, we obtained documentary data from online and hardcopy sources relating to canal and sailing holidays, including websites and publications of commercial boating holiday companies, navigation authorities and trade bodies, as well as canal and sail boaters' blogs, online fora and social media groups. We reviewed these data to provide the context for our research: organisational and regulatory structures, the shape and size of the market, consumer groups and trends, and the current issues prevalent within the sector. Second, we undertook a series of participant observations of canal and sailboat holidays between 2015 and 2017, together in the UK, and independently in the UK and the Mediterranean. These observations involved joining boaters on their trips for one or more days, engaging with the activities they undertook on their holidays, including navigating and handling the boats, cooking and eating food with fellow boaters, and engaging with their practices, such as walks and day trips to cities. We used field diaries and voice recorders to capture our observations, conversations, thoughts, feelings and reflections. Neither of us had any boating experience prior to starting the fieldwork: this allowed us to comfortably take position of a learners and newcomers and contrasted with the role of research participants' as experienced teachers of whom were able to ask questions about the various activities being undertaken (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

The first two phases of data collection (documentary research and participant observation) informed the third. In this stage, we conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews focussed on boaters' embodied perceptions of their boats and boating in terms of corporeal and material mobility, landscapes and rhythms. We interviewed 27 boaters altogether, with the interviews lasting between 30 and 90 min. The interviews took place in various locations (boats, marinas, harbours, cafes, university premises) chosen by the interviewees. Initially, interviewed boaters were identified during the participant observation after which snowball sampling was also employed, with the interviewed boaters suggesting to us others with whom we should talk.

The sample comprised 12 female and 15 male boating tourists, aged between 24 and 75 years, all of whom were travelling in groups with family or friends. The interviewees had participated in either canal boating or sailing holidays (sometimes both) and they were a mix of boat owners and hirers. All of the interviewees slept aboard the boats rather than using land-based accommodation, and the average length of trip they undertook by boat was one week. The interviewed canal boaters took their holidays on self-drive narrowboats, a vessel type unique to Britain's narrow canals, travelling mostly in northern England and Wales: the Bridgewater, the Rochdale, the Ashton, the Peak Forest, the Shropshire Union and the Llangollen Canals. The sailing holidays were more widely dispersed geographically: around the British coastline, on the Irish Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, Ionian Sea and Aegean Sea. In this instance, most predominant boats were mono-hull keelboats or yachts. When quoting the interviewees, we refer to them using their first names or pseudonyms (as chosen by the interviewees), noting also their age and their type of boat (canal or sailboat).

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which enabled us to identify the recurring patterns and themes within the data. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), this included familiarisation with data; generating initial codes; searching for themes from the identified codes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; reporting themes. The first three stages were conducted separately by the two researchers in order to allow for researcher triangulation and to best assure the trustworthiness of the thematic analysis. Practically, this meant that we engaged in a process of collaborative 'vetting' of codes and iterative discussion to achieve 'consensus of themes' (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017, p. 4). Focusing on the materiality of water and the boaters' relationship with it was not our initial main purpose when starting the data collection, however it emerged as a major recurrent theme from both of our research diaries and interviews as well as both the separate and joint coding during the thematic analysis. The identified themes were then used to structure the reporting of the analysis in the following section.

Analysis and discussion: water materialities and the tourism assemblage

The boaters come upon, and relate to, numerous materialities – natural as well as constructed, organic and inorganic physical entities – on their journeys. Watery materialities form certain configurations, and in cooperation with other materialities, human and non-human, make boating activities possible. Interacting with different materials, substances and mediums, from ground to water, water and its fluid qualities become the central materiality of affording boating tourism activities. We term this interaction *liquidness*:

a dynamic, and to a certain extent, unpredictable, interplay between materialities, mobilities and practices. As follows, we will present the analysis of the two main avenues through which boating is practised. First, we will focus on water as materiality and materialities in water that determine the constantly changing and relational boating experience. Second, we will demonstrate how water mobilities, tourist bodies and water-going vessels form material assemblages, which are key to better understanding boating tourism.

The mobility of water

Boating activities bring about a particular relationship with the water, where regardless of the specific water body, movement is directly dependent on negotiations with the unpredictable and constantly changing waterscape. This is why instead of concentrating on water tourism, we will discuss *tourism water* in terms of its materialities and mobilities and subsequent capabilities to affect and be affected. As follows, we will bring the mobility of the matter to the foreground of our analysis, discussing the physicality of water in terms of the two key aspects determining what happens when the water bodies meet the tourist bodies: the materiality *of* water and the materialities both *in* and *by* the water.

Water – in its varied states, always in movement and often independent of human will – determines and directs the boaters' passages both on the sea and on the canal. On water, a multitude of mobilities happen simultaneously: the water is in constant motion (waves, wash), and vessels move in cooperation with water (surge, heave and list) when charting their passage, or even when moored and fastened. It is the first and most fundamental manifestation of liquidness. This relationship is particularly dynamic, as it is always prone to changes affected by the state of the water, its interaction with vessels of various sizes as well as their handlers. Both canal boaters and sailing tourists absolutely depend on these properties of water as, put simply, boaters can only go where the water allows, takes, directs and sometimes forces them, creating a unique dynamic, reciprocal and circular relationship between the human and water in the hydrosocial cycle.

The seasons, particularly in terms of weather, are an important factor influencing the water's actions. Accordingly, boaters, their bodies often exposed to the elements, have to take into consideration and adjust to the dynamic weather events in terms of their plans, expectations and goals. Therefore, liquidness in boating tourism also encompasses the ever changing influence of water on touristic practice. Indeed, rain and wind have been identified among the most important in tourist weather narratives (Jeuring & Peters, 2013), which is confirmed by our findings on the particularities and importance of both canal boating and sailing. Weather events direct and influence the (im)mobilities, qualities and actions of water and boats, and humans have to work with and negotiate these elements in terms of tides, flows, levels, currents and visibility, as well as rain itself. In the case of sailing, the waves, an outcome of the interplay between the sea surface and the wind, result in a particular materiality – an intense and constantly moving waterscape that the boaters have no power over, but instead have to respond to and collaborate with.

> Riding the waves and things like that is quite exhilarating. Because the sea is not just flat, you can come to different parts where the different tides are coming in and going out, you get like a swell. So you can be going along, bombing along quite fast and then you'll come to a swell and it can be really choppy. So you have to slow down, you have to think about how you're going to go with the water, so there is quite a bit of skill in it, really. … If it's really windy, if there's no wind at all, how are you going to actually get from A to B and it's all part of the fun.
>
> (Sarah, 30, sailboat)

The movements on and with water are characterised by particular sensations, brought into sharp focus by the fact that moving vessels respond to water's dynamic properties; a form of situational equilibratory liquidness. This can be experienced as extraordinary by boaters, especially if different to their everyday lives. Whilst experienced boating tourists may grow accustomed to this dynamism over time, they too can notice it more in atypical situations, such as during especially windy or stormy weather. The considerably more pronounced sensation of movement on a sailing boat can cause seasickness, and coping with the movement of the vessel on the water is therefore crucial skill for everyone on board. Similarly, even though the boaters on inland waters do not have to deal with such volatile water surfaces comparable to those on the sea; they nevertheless have to factor in the wind, as well as currents on rivers, when manoeuvring the boat. Furthermore, the slight, almost discreet rocking motion of the boat is a constant feature of inland boating, something that boating bodies get accustomed to, only for this to cause minor physical discomfort for some when returning to the firm land after a boating holiday.

It is also important to stress that different kinds of water both within and across the various water bodies determine the particular tourist experience. Watery materialities can be vastly different: it might seem obvious, but is worth restating, that ‘not all water is blue’ (Pitt, 2018, p. 169) and welcoming. The sea can appear grey on rainy and stormy days and might then evoke other emotions depending on the particular situation, such as awe, fear or boredom. Canal water likewise has a whole range of colour and consistency qualities, from a muddy brown or grey resulting from a high sediment level, through to an iron-ore enriched orange and, at the other extreme clear transparency. All these vastly different properties of waters can bring about a whole range of emotions, from pleasure to tedium, and from fear to disgust, contingent on the situation and the individual(s) concerned. The same physical water can therefore be perceived as either wanted and unwanted, safe and dangerous, attractive and repellent from the human perspective. This has important implications for tourism: water's almost universally recognized enjoyability in leisure settings (Strang, 2004) can be in direct juxtaposition with the still and often grey or brown canal water which can be perceived as contaminated or polluted. Although the visual and aural consumption of every kind of water is mostly perceived as pleasurable, potential physical contact can evoke different feelings, such as a sense of hazard or revulsion.

There are also a number of other materialities in and near the water which boating bodies have to negotiate. For instance, there

are always potential frictions along a vessel's route, be they the physical canal, riverbanks, seashores or the multitude of materials and debris carried in the water, from natural sediment to various human-made artefacts. What happens with the boats in and on the water is heavily dependent on these materialities, and how they determine and direct the mobility of water and, correspondingly, the movement or non-movement of vessels. For boaters on the canals and rivers, the variety of human made artefacts in the water is a constant feature as well as a source for worry. A canal boat can easily get caught up on a shopping trolley thrown into a shallow canal; and a tyre or rope discarded in the canal can catch onto the propeller. For this purpose, the boaters are always paying attention to the movement of water, debris in the water, and the ways their boat moves among these varied materialities. When an unexpected encounter occurs, all the different human and non-human materialities will have to collaborate in a coordinated and creative waterside practice where materials, competences and meanings meet (cf. Shove et al., 2012):

> We got a tyre fitted… thrown in the canal and fitted around the propeller of this boat. … We went down the weed hatch and tied one of the mooring ropes to the tyre and then tied the tyre off to a bridge. Tied the other end of the rope off to a bridge; then backed the boat up and then, with a front rope, several of us would pull the boat as hard as we could, move as fast as we could and use the momentum of the boat to snatch the tyre off the prop.
>
> (Phil, 68, canal boat)

We have highlighted that it is the water (and not the will of the boater) that carries the boat on the water: people open and close the lock gates on canals or set, adjust and lower the sails on the sea, but all these activities would be absolutely futile without water (cf. Mukerji, 2009). Water makes boat mobility possible and compels boaters to act in ways that is solicited by it, inviting them to act in particular ways. This elemental physicality of water plays a central role in all the boating activities, which means that we ought to think about tourists across various waters, co-performing tourism with watery materialities. Water is an independent non-human actant in these particular boating tourism situations, attracting and often demanding human attention. The agency of water in tourism contexts therefore lies both in natural forces and human will (typically that of the tourist or tourism provider) working in collaboration with a number of other mobile materialities.

Water-boat-human assemblage: the cooperation of the human and material

Boating tourism is made possible because of an ever-changing and multidirectional interplay within an assemblage of water, boats and humans. The liquidness of the relationship between these three core elements is central in terms of the tourist experience of the water. Full of heterogeneous materialities constantly in motion, this assemblage is composed as a complex of relations, affordances and embodied experiences that produce the experience of being mobile on and with the boat and the water. The assemblages facilitated by the mobilities on water therefore are sensorial, both temporary and purposeful organisations of various material and non-material elements. When the agency of water meets with human agency, the outcome is a dynamic, simultaneously affective and functional bond between the tourist and the various materialities. The reason for this is that water is not just a passive matter, a backdrop of sorts that affords and directs boatmobility – it enters into direct and often unpredictable relations with boaters' bodies, often involving close embodied and sensory interaction. The intersections of these various embodied experiences and corporeal practices contribute significantly to the production of the tourism experience (Crouch & Desforges, 2003; Edensor, 2006, 2007).

The (sailing or canal) boat is the most important materiality brokering the experience and mediating between the human and water in boating tourism context. In boating tourism, the boats are central actants, 'crucial in tourism performances primarily because they have use-value that enhances the physicality of the body and enables it to do things and sense realities that would otherwise be beyond its capabilities' (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006, p. 276). The combination of a person, boat and water thus constitutes a human-non-human, or more specifically human-substance-artefact assemblage. This entity operates as a whole, possessing a variety of capacities that surpass those of its components, but which can also at some point be disassembled into its constitutive parts to a certain degree (cf. Dant, 2014). However, there are always traces of each left with the others: salty water on the boaters' clothes, the handcuff key for opening city centre canal locks in boater's pocket, the wastewater from the shower or kitchen sink left in the sea or the canal. In many ways, the varying states of water extend and also define this sensorial assemblage as well as make it active and ever changing. Just as water changes its states, the assemblage can also be more or less tight, but never really fully disassembling.

> Another experience, another emotion, just sea, you know, choppy sea, frothy sea, blue sea, just experiences. The senses is probably just as good a word as experiences, every sense, smells, feel, touch, taste, there's something about a boat, it smells different. It's always a bit oily, with diesel and then of course you get the wind and the sea, generally tends to splash up on the side of the boat we're on. The smell of the ozone. The sound of the seagulls. Again, it's all your senses are aware
>
> (Henry, 61, sailboat)

The water-boat-human therefore forms in and through the dynamic coming together and cooperation of the human, elemental and technological component. A liquidness of being in which the human, on and with the boat, transforms into something new and qualitatively different that can cruise on, along, with and across the water. Different vessels also possess different affordances in terms of their speed, manoeuvrability, and the level of control the individual person has over it and water determines the mobility of both the sailing tourist as well as the canal boater in terms of movement, route, direction, and speed. In order to embody and inhabit the assemblage successfully, the human component of the water-boat-human needs a set of embodied skills, which are acquired in consistent creative and dynamic repetition, until they are built into the boating routines as near unconscious, habitual movements.

These skills vary depending on the particular boat and water and can include steering the boat, working the locks and the lift and swing bridges and manoeuvring the boat on the canal or setting the sail, balancing the boat, staying on course on the sea. Performing

these sets of complicated bodily tasks and actions with required precision, simultaneousness and timing presupposes a cultivation of series boating specific bodily techniques that cannot be learned by verbal explanations or written instructions alone, but instead have to be acquired through multi-sensorial practice (cf. Andersson, Östman, & Öhman, 2015). The working assemblage cannot emerge if its human element does not engage in simultaneously creative and repetitive embodied actions and practices. An excellent example of this is the act of steering or helming the boat, a key prerequisite for the assemblage's directed mobility from the human perspective, which involves constant interaction with the boat and water, using the tiller and gear, being attuned to the currents and cross-currents, feeling the flow of water and reacting to its movements. There, the water-boat-human's dynamism is co-constituted by the human practice and the physical elements of the boat in cooperation with their surroundings such as the water, bottom of the sea or canal, and the coast or banks.

The water-boat-human is thus realised through the material, embodied and emotional coming together, an active and engaged interaction between the human and material because 'touch, in a word, confirms the materiality of the visible' (Ingold, 2000, p. 259). Haptic sensations of water on one's body can be relaxing during swim in the sea, but also signify need to enhanced concentration with weather suddenly turned stormy, or the danger of possible contamination in case of falling into the stagnant canal water. Both planned and unexpected encounters with water are part and parcel of the boating experience, further highlighting the dynamism of the water-boat-human:

> [On rough sea] you're [the boat] on your side and you [the sailor] could be getting wet. That's a nice thing about it as well – when you do get a wave you're not expecting and you get freezing cold water. But it's quite refreshing! It's all part of it!
>
> (Sarah, 30, sailboat)

Potentially dangerous aspects are perceived as part of the challenge of sailing, as for all the liquidity of the human-water relationship, there is also certain dialectical action and counteraction element to it, highlighting 'the sheer power of water, which goes far beyond just material resistance to human agency' (Edgeworth, 2014, p. 159). Liquidness, that is, constant volatility, dynamic change or its anticipation is therefore an essential property of the water-boat-human: 'You never know. That's coping with the elements, and coping with the situations. It's a completely different set of problems that you are being thrown into' (Brenda, 63, sailboat).

The relationship that develops with the boat in the course of these activities and practices is far from instrumental. A vital aspect of entering into the boat-human assemblage is that from the boaters' perspective, the boat is an active and agentive element in the assemblage. There are technological, technical, material and bodily manoeuvrings and machinations that go into running a boat and thus extend the intentionality of the water-boat-human assemblage. The intentionality of this assemblage is co-created between the human and material: from the boaters' perspective and in terms of steerability or manoeuvrability of different vessels, the boat, too, has an agency: 'a mind of its own' (Mike, 49, canal boat). The assemblage thus requires a competence simultaneously embedded within the human and the material, where both the vessel and the water play a central role. In collaboration with the body (with its tacit knowledge) of the boater at helm, the assemblage will thus know when and how move the tiller, the precise moment to start reversing or turning the boat, or when to push the lock gates open. The steerer and boat need to work together, collaborate, and have an understanding between them in order to achieve the desired outcome and the boat is not a passive object, but a personified actant to cooperate with: 'boats are often thought to be alive [and] to be able to sense their environment' (Jalas, 2009, p. 212).

Water-boat-human is an assemblage that forms through the coming together and cooperation of the human, material and technological component. This skilful human-material assemblage is a continuous and processual entity that constitutes of the abilities, expertise and knowledge developed and developing through practice and in interaction with the watery materialities. On and with the boat, the human being transforms into a new entity, one that can sail or cruise on the water. In order to do that successfully, the human component of the water-boat-human needs a set of embodied skills, which are acquired with consistent creative and dynamic repetition, until they become part of the boater's taskscape, allow the assemblage to function properly, realise its potential and achieve its goals in terms of tourist experience. It is therefore a relationally, sensorially and physically mobile triad.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented an analysis of water in terms of boating tourism as exemplified in lived encounters across two different bodies of water, vessel types and modes of movement: canal boats on the inland waterways and sailboats on the seas. Boating tourism presents itself in two key ways: first, through the material properties of water and the objects in water; and secondly, through the ever-changing assemblage of water-boat-human. By conceptualising the agentive properties of water in determining how boating emerges, we have shown how the watery materialities determine and co-constitute the boating tourist experience, extending far beyond being just an infrastructural facilitator of movement of this particular mode of transport. Indeed, it is this immediate and agentive role of water in determining boating practice that has often been overlooked in the tourism literature. Boating tourism is enacted and experienced through *liquidness.* Manifesting itself in the agentive mobilities of the water and in the constantly changing, mobile assemblages of the water-boat-humans, liquidness comes to being through the cooperation between the human and the material, facilitated by human practices.

The liquidness of boating tourism

Water's most obvious and evident manifestation is its liquid materiality and the fluid nature of water bodies create the unpredictability of the boating tourism experience. We have shown that water's role in boating tourism is central and constitutive.

Water is not simply a background or 'surrounding' (Lepoša, 2018, p. 20) to a variety of human activities. It is in and of itself: an ever-changing elemental materiality, which is constantly in motion. Its physical and metaphorical liquidness is exemplified in the tides, flows and currents, influenced by the seasons and weather, but still in close relationship with the humans in terms of the hydrosocial cycle (Linton & Budds, 2014). In the context of boating tourism, never is this liquidness more apparent than when water is absent (drought, low tide, human intervention), in short supply (running aground in the shallows) or overly plentiful (floods, strong currents, storm surges).

Watery materialities enable the movement of boats, which brings us to the second key element of liquidness, namely mobility. Movement is certainly essential to boating tourism, where the particular mode of movement is central to the tourist experience. However, as we have demonstrated in this paper, mobility in boating tourism extends beyond the physical movement of vessels in water. In terms of the liquidness of boating tourism, there are numerous materialities and mobilities in perpetual interplay. Water is in constant movement and it, likewise, causes constant movement, as is evident in the simultaneous movement of water, materialities in water, vessels, the humans on the vessels and with the vessels. This mobility is simultaneously meaningful and embodied. The result of these dynamic relations is the mobility assemblage which we have labelled water-boat-human. It foregrounds the role of the watery materialities – essentially a series of relationships between the human and material where the non-human participants of these encounters are not inert and passive, on the contrary, they are lively and agentive, directly affecting the ways various assemblages conduct themselves.

The third essential element of liquidness contributing to a deeper understanding of boating tourism is practice, realised through particular embodied and mobile undertakings, performed in cooperation with numerous materialities. It is through the practices that the human element of the water-boat-human is able to negotiate the assemblage. Successful participation in the water-boat-human means learning numerous boating (and other) skills, which are honed via constant creative repetition. The boating skillset 'is a property not of the individual human body as a thing-in-itself, but of the total system of relations constituted by the presence of the organism-person in a richly structured environment' (Ingold, 1996, p. 178). The resulting assemblage is always in the process of changing and modifying, learning new skills, adjusting to the particularities of a certain situation and responding to the watery agency, 'always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed' (Deleuze, 1997, p. 1). To conclude, the complex, ever changing and liquid assemblage of boating creates a constant and ongoing sense of adventure and excitement for the tourist, facilitated by water's unpredictability.

Recommendations for industry and further research

Our research suggests some practical insights for tourism industry. For instance, much boating holiday advertising focuses on the boat and the human (Page, Steele, & Connell, 2006) components of the triad that we have explained here through the notion of the water-boat-human assemblage, leaving water relatively unattended. Holiday promotion according to craft type and the land-based destinations alongside which boating takes place is typical (Skračić & Kosović, 2016). However, our research suggests there might be commercial opportunity to emphasise learning and skill mastery as experiential outcomes of holidays. The nature of the assemblage means that novice boaters develop fledgling abilities, amateurs become more proficient and the experienced gain greater expertise with exposure to new water bodies, varied sailing conditions, different boat types and new environmental influences. In this way, market segmentation is possible in order to promote boating holidays across the variety of water bodies and vessels to tourists with different levels of boating proficiency (cf. Jamal, Aminudin, & Kausar, 2019). This focus on mastery is especially articulated in adventure tourism advertising (Page et al., 2006) and its scarcity is noticeable in boating tourism, where the dominant theme is often relaxation. Furthermore, the subjugation of water in advertising – mirroring the academic research gap that we describe at the start of our paper – in favour of representations of boat and human components, offers potential for promoting water more explicitly. Water not only facilitates mobility but also is, in itself, in constant motion. Thus, boating holidays allow prolonged connectivity with the elemental and the potential for tourist experiences of awe, adventure, wellbeing and rumination over the human impact on this natural resource.

Several potential future streams of research emerge from our paper. We have focussed on engaging with self-driven boats, where the tourist has considerable agency over manoeuvring and steering the vessel. In doing so we have left larger scale water-based assemblages, such as cruise ships, out of our discussion and thus future research might encompass this form of tourism. This might reveal modified insights into the liquidness of water tourism because of the ways in which the staging of tourist experiences by tourism providers can sometimes eradicate certain aspects of the liquidness of the water as an active component of the experience, highlighting certain properties of the water while suppressing others. Also fruitful for further study are activities like swimming, snorkelling and scuba diving. Here, the human connection with water, as well as the ways these are mediated through the technological materialities (the gear and special clothing), are immediate and might offer qualitatively different notions of liquidness. Equally, we are also mindful that, as with Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner,* our analysis presents water everywhere, nor any drop to drink. Therefore, future research on liquidness within boating tourism could focus not only on water as facilitator of mobility but look at the interplay with potable water, important experientially in boating tourism because of the lack of on-board access to water mains supplies, and critical existentially given water's importance for human survival.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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